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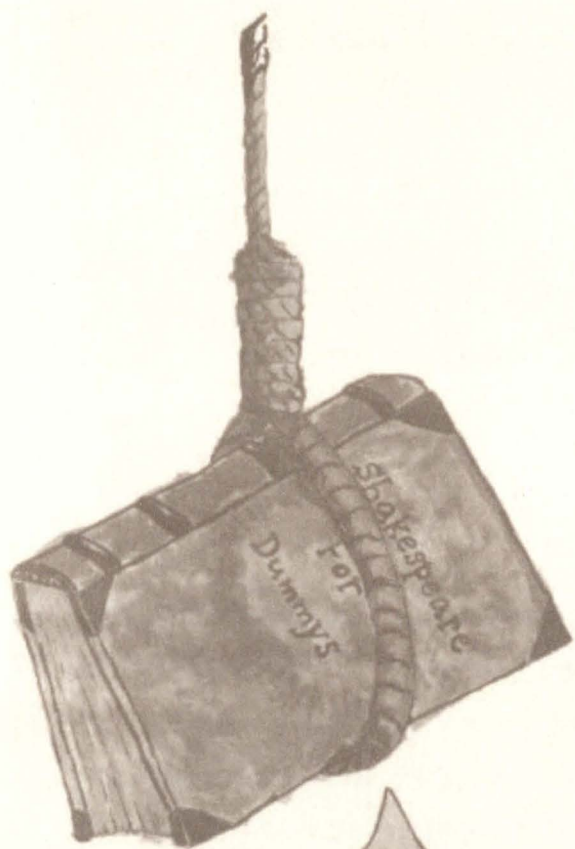


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Winter 2006

NEXUS

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Letter to the Reader

As always, we appreciate the efforts of those who submitted. Your words helped us through the inevitable frustrations of putting an issue together and reminded us that sharing art with the world is always a worthy goal. We would also like to extend advance gratitude to those who will read the issue. If you like it (or even if you hate it), send us a poem, or a story, or a picture. The only thing we advise against is indifference.

Our ultimate hope is that you find one line or phrase or image amongst these pages that engenders that most wonderful connection between author and audience—the moment when you read the words of someone you've never met but are sure that, for at least one moment, you were both centered in the exact same place amidst the undulating current of spontaneous emotion, that whirlpool of anguish and elation which governs all of our impulses towards Art. We trust that, once you have had that experience, you will not rest until you have created something which produces a similar experience in someone else.

A final word: distrust the archetypes and the bar graphs. Regard those who would categorize “post” and “pre” and those who are compelled to label contrasting “isms” with suspicion, if not contempt. Read the work of individuals as an individual. Most importantly: Enjoy.

The staff would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance (unpaid, at that) in producing the issue: David Kenworthy and Stephanie Gorby.

SUBMISSIONS

Nexus publishes poetry, short stories, flash fiction, novel excerpts (that can stand alone), memoirs, photography, graphic prints, drawings, digital art, and paintings. Each piece is considered for its effectiveness in style, detail, mood, and content. We neither endorse nor prohibit any particular genre or stylistic approach.

Each submission should include a cover letter with a brief biographical statement and the following contact information: artist's name, address, e-mail address, and telephone number. Our preferred means of submission is via e-mail, but we continue to accept print submissions. Please note that we do not return submissions.

Ironically, submission can be defined either as action (bravely offering your unique artistic perspective to the world and rejecting the fleeting relevance of judgment and criticism) or inaction (acquiescing to present circumstances and keeping quiet). We strongly hope that you will exercise the first definition.

SUBMIT!

Nexus Literary Journal
E104 Student Union
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Her Royal
Majesty the Queen
decrees:

****in cases of accidental contact with the eyes, induce
vomiting and call your doctor immediately.*

Here presented are
the submitted and then
summarily accepted
artistic pieces in
literary form for the
consumption of the
general public
(lay people).

Evocation

(for Thom Gunn)

No one here reads Adrienne Rich.
Shakespeare is banished, and Eliot
has too much of a "swaggering gait."

Worse, no one sweats.

Our armpits are full of plugged pores,
juices yearning to leak into fresh air,
but we have learned to stand in the rain
and pretend. It's funereal and graceful,
perhaps, so many people out in rainy
afternoons, little paper cups of coffee
in our hand as we think of our fathers
who taught us to always bet on the middle
horse, the silent one, the 20-1 longshot.
Lately, we've taken to smoking.
Something about the click of a lighter,
the hiss of sparks fuming into flame
helps remind us that we can survive
without Sylvia Plath or Mina Loy.
We can poke pins into Robert Frost
pinups and not go blind ourselves.
We do not worry. We do not sweat.
We simply brace ourselves against the dark.

Frunk O'Hara's Dreamscape

You were once a legend
remembering every August
of a cobalt blue sky
betraying the alphabet
as an only child
would collect everything
when others murder memory
of nature's blood ties,
you jazz up sensation
keeping language above us
scrawling on buildings
imprinted by skyline thunder
in the midst of Prussian grey,
demanding orange or red
in the midst of showers
to appear in paintings
never forsaking the music
close to your own voice
idle but inquisitive
to fondle in front
of the moonscape
over a striptease of heaven
passing your drawn finger
huddled in love's debris
acting out what is lost
from today's newsprint
along the northern slums
awaiting creation
even from dying Elms
you stutter in whispers
"let's wait
for a real dog day's night."

Sonnet in a Wet Season

...and it seemed to me/that her ways were free,
and sunshine walked beside her.

Emmy Lou Harris

This has been the year of The Great Flood, of more rain than
Anyone can remember, of gardens and hopes drowned.

For of course we have not enough years to remember long,
Or worse, and of yours now thirty-seven are gone.

Ah, but humanity's flower, our burning bush, is our imagination.
So while sweating wring such tomatoes from the rotting damp as we can,

Its blossoms bloom, and our skull-fire shows us the next drought; the next sea
Of troubled waters, rising; the icy end. What we cannot remember we are con-
demned to
imagine.

Yet....Your roses did flower this year, their rainbow profusion
Engendered by those same rains that stunted the garden.

And your other flowers too, our Eden's weeping skies lit even into dun November.
So now the winter comes, your thirty-eighth? And now the caterpillars

Predict our sunlit roads are temporary? Still, our gift cuts, sometimes, our way:
Some worms, eventually, butterflies. And this year, against the coming ice, your
warm
flowering day.

Robert Lee Mahon

Effaced

(What was your face before you were born?)

Because his mind was like his dilapidated truck
that plowing through a blizzard whirled to a stop
in a ditch, was buried by flakes, making the cab dark,
cramped, and dangerous, he confined himself to his trailer.

Each morning he hid from dawn, crouched like
a prisoner in sleep's cell, until one day torn awake
by cawing crows he peered out a window at a stray cat
tinted red by sunrise, searching the drifted yard for scraps.

Heedless as a child too quick to pity the needy
he tossed it leftover rice, piece of chicken. It leaped,
chewed, not once looking up. Finished, it cleaned paws,
legs, belly, tail, walked away as if it inhabited a world free

of time, vanished in the snow as crows dove
and scolded. The ritual was set and every day after
the cat left he sipped coffee, intimidated by a trembling
face staring up out of the cup, the only one there to judge

him since the night he put a match to a photo
of his former wife taken at their wedding, punched
and shattered the last mirror. He would reflect and doze,
confronted again by one-sided quarrels, demands of regret.

Light circled window to window; TV, clock,
radio, phone gathered dust; furnace rattled, barely
making enough heat to keep mice he used to kill cozy.
Often one would sit at his feet, front paws raised, pressed

together as if in prayer, stare until it received
a cracker. For hours he lay in bed barely conscious,
mattress Huck's raft drifting on the Mississippi or a cot
from his childhood's attic where a skylight, like a polished

Edward Beatty

11

lens, exposed him to moon, blank space, stars.
Every day remained the same until his food ran low
and he waded the lane, followed the road to the old iron
and plank bridge that spanned the Rock River, led to town.

Crossing, he was drawn to the railing, like a kid
leaned, imagined he stood on one of the ice chunks
swept along the water. Suddenly the river stopped and
clouds, trees, homes on the far shore rushed east like smoke

into a vacuum. He clutched a cable as sun off ice
sheathing beams and girders blinded him. He heard
bat hit ball, a woman call, "Time to eat. Come and get it."
Longing to join that family he tensed to jump, but his sight

returned and he saw a trench, bodies with bones
sticking through skin, lips crawling with flies. Dogs
fed on the dying and he felt that their eyes and the eyes
of the people were his. Moans rose, flowed to him, entered

his forehead. All at once a wheel of flame rolled
across the bridge, left nothing but smoke and ashes.
He woke in bed. Mice clawed in a dresser drawer, frost
ticked, furnace gathered its breath, mattress slowly melted.

Before dawn he set out the last of the food and
departed. He walked, his eyes stung by the sun, ears
ringing from the caws of crows, reached the bridge that
looked as fragile as blown glass. He stopped, afraid to take

the next step. It was then the stray cat appeared
on the horizon, leaped, tore away the sun's scarlet
veil. Her face burned him with shame, her eyes pursued
as he hurried across the bridge, glared from every window

as he stumbled into the town. He fell. Suddenly
teeth gripped the skin at the back of his neck, lifted
and dragged him away. His mind cleared as her features,
like his, were left behind—only paw prints in frozen snow.



They tried to break you by killing you. A sheep's
head grin and stab through your ivory heart.
Thick blood in your yellow hair. Your ashen
skin was for the taking, and had been for twenty-nine
years. A long time to live as the ineffable
and the hated. Oh brother, it had been a long
time since our pellet-rifle childhood, when
we walked all day through dusty roads and
slept in the ditches. It had been a long
time since those mystical mornings that always
left us sad by days end. The beautiful kills!
I can still see you with piles of herons,
grosbecks, and fish crows. At night, deep
in the swamp, every frog uttered your name and
I knew we weren't quite alike. Oh brother, they
destroyed you at the moment of your perfect crime,
with their ethos and increase of the electric eye.
No, not like men do they survive, but like beasts
fed on iron and no brains. For their unknowing
desire for meager order, they broke your purple mind.
I drink from it still, your purple mind. We fly from
the face of great fear, but you always went to it like a Spartan,
who never fears the elephant charge that will stomp him out.

The Knowledge of Trees

It is so difficult
to lie down among the trees
and stare upward
at their waving
tops, their thin, delicate
branches, shimmering
with leaves of light
and darkness,
to relax into the slow surge
of their roots
searching out
the stronger earth.

But to be rooted,
even for a moment,
in such stillness,
in life so solid
it almost has the quietness
of stones
is to know
that sickness seeks restlessness,
that death loves ambition,
that the ancient Chinese
poets who meditated
among forests and fog,

those whose poems
have lived for a thousand years,
slept and dreamed
at the base of trees
where even time
dwindles into the slow
tick and turn

of seasons,

and words fall
as softly as snow
rewriting once again
the quiet clarity,
the eternal landscape

while the trees,
quiescent, anchored
listen
into the healing pool
of earth's long dream

and barely speak at all.

Poem for the Graveyard Vandals

So you broke the stone strings of a lyre,
decapitated an angel.
So you knocked down three tombstones
with unreadable names of people
who died three hundred years ago
in whatever was on the site
of where Pittsburgh is now.
So you howled like stray cats
at your bloodless slaughter,
at how easy the dead
could give way in your hands.
So you drove off in your living cars,
Fords and Oldsmobiles.
So you roared past the accident
just off the highway,
barely braking for the busted fenders,
the broken bones, the raging fire.
You drove all over Pennsylvania
with your headlights semaphoring,
"We are the living! We are the living!"
You did that until, so tired and drunk,
you stumbled through the ratty doors
or the unlatched windows of your
decrepit homes and crawled beneath
your unwashed sheets to sleep it off.
You dreamed of a final joyride,
a slick road, twisting wheel,
a tree trunk smacking harder than
a heavyweight's glove,
metal and glass and gas-smell and
your bodies cold and bleeding,
your angels coming toward you
down the dark road,

plucking silently
the toll of your faded names,
great sucking voids,
dark and droning,
where their heads should be.

Not Far From It

A guy once told me

I was down in Guatemala doing volunteer service
Christian sort of stuff and I was hitchhiking back
This American stopped in his truck and said
‘You need to get back into town?’

I said

‘Yeah’

So he was driving and we started talking about
What I was doing here and he said that Guatemala
Is a great country and that he hopes I enjoy it
Then after awhile of driving he said

‘I ran a guy over with my truck one day here’

I said

‘Yeah?’

He said the guy was a Guatemalan and was looking
At this guy’s Guatemalan wife funny

‘So I just ran him over with my truck’

He said that he left the guy on the edge
Of the road said

‘This is a great country you’ll love it here’

I said

‘Yeah’

He said

‘Yeah you can do whatever you want’

I bet Japan is sort of like Guatemala in that it’s nice
I think you’ll love it

I said

‘Yeah’

Sagittarius

In addition to crashing through the underbrush like centaurs,
Joey Hollis and I puzzled over mathematics and the correct way to write
a cursive “k.” We were a bit like Oxford dons. My father’s name is Don.
He studied early Victorian literature and got a job; I studied late Victorian
literature and didn’t. Issues, divisions. But he took me to see *2001*—by
now I was supposed to be calling home from the moon. My future keeps
disconnecting. I try to read the constellations to figure out what’s coming
next. I’m no Babylonian or Greek: my patterns have to fit my culture,
as when I penciled a scatter of dots into a turkey or George Washington.
Besides, due to light pollution, my charts have to stay close to home. The
chips in the windshield I see all the time. Those I see only when the sun
rakes in late afternoon. The hole in my jeans’ right pocket just below the
rip in my jacket. The three scars on my stomach and the lump over my
right eyebrow. They all look like money to me.

The Unknown

At twenty, studying in his dorm room, he read of a blind Chinese sage who said, "Life is not a journey that ends in a hole," and he thought

of a child crouching in a coal cellar, imagining life without sight. The panting furnace rattled the door latch; spiders strung clinging fibers.

Recalled night in a windowless attic, fingertips pressed to eyelids, trying to see without light, but only fire and a kaleidoscope of pain came.

In time sleep rotted the floor and he fell until dirt squeezed his skin and bones, earthworms sucked the air away. Where did he dwell and

what did he become while he waited for soil to change to coal, coal to diamonds, diamonds to light as morning dug his body up? Startled,

he closed the textbook and thinking of Plato's squinting, intimidated prisoner, left his room, walked to a park where jonquils pulsed amber

around girls in scanty swimsuits sprawled on the grass, surrendering their skin to the sun. Sweat beaded along ankle, calve, knee, thigh,

dampened places hidden from view. He fled, wandered decades as if in a tunnel of scales a snake shed until one night he found himself

trapped in a trailer down power lines and rain

made into a metal drum. After so many years he still wondered, "Was the sage right? Plato?

What's dark mean to one blind?" Peering out he saw black, and needles of light flashing in the corners of his eyes, as if sewing them shut.

Though the storm grew, he heard tap, tap, tap and thought, "Is it leaking water, a white cane approaching, come to lead me away, nothing?"

The Bargain Chains

New bargains every day
in our packed aisles, come on!
Trappist jams, lamps in the form
of buddhas, striped baskets,
ceramic bowls of potpourri
that will never scent a room
after the first five minutes.

All the gifts you buy friends
who thank you profusely
before stowing them in a closet
or taking them to the dump
the next week. The detritus
of busted capitalism, shops,
businesses gone belly up,

of sweatshops in Guam
making baskets for a nickel.
This is the bizarre bazaar
of knickknacks nobody truly
wants – bargains galore.
Everything you don't need
at prices you can afford.

Myths of Hawaii: Maluae and the Underworld

Undone by death, while stuck knee-deep in mud
and taro, he was unaware of the vague,
winged solitude that swept around his fields,
an empty landscape of thatch, palms and rain.

The gods, now sorry for killing his boy,
whom they discovered gorging himself on
bananas stolen from their altar place,
gave Maluae a piece of burning lava
to fight the deadly spirits he would find
deep down within the entrails of the earth.

He squatted patiently above the sea
entrance to hell in a vast breadfruit tree
with other souls, waiting for it to break
with their united weight. And when the branch
finally snapped, the ghosts – lined up like fog
above the underworld – fell into Po.

Maluae left behind in terraced fields
what he was, a plain farmer of soft daylight
and sweet potatoes, for what he became,
an intruding blade of light, granted just one
thrust through the reddish pomegranate of hell.

And with the god's fire stone, he melted down
the valley walls of a pacific birthright
and quarreled with the whole of Po until
he found his son in the foundations, still
stuffing bananas into a sobbing mouth.

A Chekhov Moment

You collect white violets
and stuff them
in Grandpa's vest
near his stopwatch
while he sleeps like a seraph
on the black sofa,
until an October bell sounds
and he wakes up
with the nonchalance
of time lost and regained.

After the Wedding

Guests gone, gifts rewrapped
and exchanged for credit slips.
Rented tux returned. The best man
in bed with the bridesmaid
who caught the thrown bouquet.

Man and wife, anxious after a
red-eye flight, toss on the kingsized
mattress in a Hawaiian hotel,
lonely for those they left behind.

After sex, insomnia,
punched pillows, flying feathers,
wondering, maybe, they made a mistake.
Swallowing sleeping pills
like love potions, they lose count
of sheep humping in the fold
of the wolf's lair.

Morning the newlyweds dress,
swap rings under each eye and renew
their vows in the lush room,
where the real world is nowhere
to be seen.

G uardian Angels

Do they argue about the assignments,
all wanting the interesting ones
who'll cause no end of trouble,
curse thrillingly,
ignore the rules
and commit mortal sins with impunity,
who'll have too much to drink
and then start fights
on the pitted blacktop of rain-washed parking lots
under the glare of sodium lights?

And when they lose a feather or two
in these dustups,
do they catch themselves saying *oh, shit!*
Do they find themselves swiping smokes
from a stray pack, lighting up
as they sit on the back step
of some rusting brokedown Winnebago,
with two Dobermans, watching their bad boy
toss back a couple cold ones with his
miscreant buddies?

Do they grow to love
the pocketa-pocketa of a Harley
and suffer sympathetic hangovers
the morning after
standing in front of the bathroom mirror
swallowing aspirin
and drinking glass after glass of cold water,
studying the dark circles under their angelic eyes
and the dried blood crusting the scrape on their cheek
where it met the pavement the night before?

MaryJo White

S olar Eclipse

I like to see my shadow in a field on a night when there's barely
enough moonlight. It's good to see it on the pavement when I walk past a
hospital. It wouldn't be so good to see it surrounded by blood in the mid-
dle of a road, though it would be better to see it than not to see it. But I
wouldn't want to see it start to absorb the blood. I like to see my shadow
lying next to Myra's, even if we're waiting at a crowded corner. I worry
about the negative effects of having a dead leaf lie in the shadow of my
head, or a puddle where the lungs would be. (My reflection is numb, a
combination of ghost and blank canvas. Seeing it look back from on the
glass over Ed Ruscha's Paradise hasn't helped me much.) On a frosty day,
I like to stand with my back to the sun so that my breath flows from my
shadow—but just for a moment, because my exhale shows only that I was
alive, and I can't see any inhales, and I'm growing colder by the second.

Mark Cunningham

27

Birthday

At midnight Rock River was like a lighted city street between his mobile home, skinned with ice, and the village tavern's red, white, and blue pulse.

He watched an almost full moon dissolve into snow that changed a locked gate, gravel lane, and rabbit nibbling a seedling into a gray window pane.

The pines began to sigh, muted only when the crows atop an oak announced dawn, then dropped, pecked, seized and swallowed yesterday's remains.

At noon he studied a feral cat crouched by a juniper shredding a sparrow. All it left was scarlet spots on white, crumpled brown feathers, its tracks.

By three, stubbled fields sparkled like shattered glass and the rusted iron and plank bridge spanning the river seemed to be a sculpture carved from fire.

As twilight's last cup of coffee breathed in his veins and arteries and the clock honed each minute he dared to think no beer, no gin had dulled his day.

At midnight he opened the door. Ice cracked and fell. A coyote trotting down the lane halted, turned, its eyes as clear as the full moon, as still as his blood.



Our Hands Were Cold

Kevin's drunk. I'm certain this is why he is the only one of us not freezing as all of us have our windows rolled down. The cost of not wanting my car to completely reek is numb fingers. I hurry the last few puffs so I can ditch the butt and get my window rolled up. When I'm done, I toss the glowing orange filter out of the car, watch it fly away behind us. I watch it in the mirror thinking that it must have traveled a mile, at least, before hitting the road and dancing further away from us on the asphalt. I've never seen a cigarette fly so far before.

Out here, especially past midnight, there's nothing blocking anyone's view. There's nothing but fields on either side of us, some soy, some corn, either way they're nothing but dead roots and frozen soil. Every once in a while, every mile or so, the empty Northwestern Ohio landscape is punctuated by a house, most of them glowing and decorated for Christmas. In between houses I fantasize twenty more, shimmering, transparent, turning this rural landscape into Centerville, my home.

"Wood County sucks," Jon says, sitting in the back, passenger side.

"Wood County!" Kevin, sitting next to Jon, shouts out his still-open window. Tony, sitting next to me in the passenger seat, just shakes his head, laughs. I use the universal window control to put up and lock Kevin's window. A dumb idea as drunk as he is. Of course, just Kevin being drunk is a bad idea in and of itself. He's already been caught in the dorms twice. One more time and he'll be doing community service. That's why we're out here, driving around, wasting our time.

"I can't wait to get home," I say, mostly to Tony, who is from Centerville too.

"Home isn't much better," he answers. I turn and look at his profile, shoulders slumped, hairline receding.

"Sure it is," I say.

"You haven't gone home yet."

He's right. I don't know what to expect. He's a year older than me and knows what it's like to go home after not seeing anyone for four months.

"You don't want to go home, Rick," Jon says from the back, his voice slick like a blackjack dealer's. "You should stay here."

"I'm not going to stay here over break."

"C'mon, we can hang out."

Jon is staying over break, in his dorm room with special permission, so he can continue working as a night auditor at a hotel next to the university.

"No way," I say, "I'm getting the hell..."

"Pull over!" Kevin shouts, interrupting me.

I don't stop to think about it. I hate vomit and there's no way I'm cleaning any up tonight. When the car is stopped, Kevin opens the door and stumbles out. Instead of kneeling over and retching, he runs across the street to the end of a driveway. I barely noticed the house set back from the road and not covered with holiday decorations. A moment later he hops back into the backseat holding two reflectors—one red, one blue—slams his door and tells me to go.

"What the hell?" Tony says, turning toward Kevin to give him a nearly-stern look.

Kevin laughs, at first by himself, but is soon joined by Jon.

I'm not thrilled that Kevin just stole somebody's driveway reflectors, but I don't mind all that much either. In fact, I hardly mind at all. When Jon tells me to stop a few miles down the road, I stop. He returns to the car a moment later with five reflectors. These stops and starts, the increasing number of reflectors on the floor of the back seat—it all becomes a pattern, a favorite new game. It's almost one of craftsmanship. The sleeping child was made of wood. Its edges and paint were uneven and crude. We were stunned. This wasn't anything that anyone bought in a store. Someone made this. Someone poured time and energy into an artifact of faith—a sloppy, unprofessional, but honest and true manifestation of religious belief. It wasn't that we felt guilt for stealing a religious figure straight out of a nativity scene, it's that we stole a pure and beautiful article of someone else's faith. I thought about wise men, animals, beggars, Mary and Joseph all kneeling, staring at an empty space on the ground. Maybe they'll look up at the stars and not see any. They won't see the single star burning brightly above them. The moon is blocking them out. Or maybe we stole that too.

We are stopped. Kevin hopped out of the car a moment ago. There are no reflectors here and he ran up toward the house. I am nervous. He isn't going to rob them or anything, but he can't be doing anything good. I sit behind the wheel watching clouds pass slowly in front of the moon. They steal the light briefly and pass on, giving it back.

"Oh my God," Tony says, looking out the window.

Kevin is running back toward the car, carrying a large, flat piece of plywood, its corners cut in curves. It's shaped almost like a cloud, or smooth stone, shaped for skipping. He jumps into the back seat, slams the door and shouts at me to go. I'm sure if it were hotter my tires would be peeling out on the asphalt.

"What the hell did you take?" I ask him.

He just laughs.

"Dude," Jon says. "Dude, you did not just take this."

"What is it?" Tony asks now.

"You don't want to know," Jon says.

"Tell me or you're walking home," I say.

"I stole the baby Jesus," Kevin says, between laughs.

Without speaking we drive back to the dorms. I drop Kevin and Jon off

by the front door. Tony rides out to overflow parking with me so I don't have to walk back alone. As we walk, Tony points out that the moon has taken on a red hue.

"I've never seen a blood moon in December," I tell him.

"They happen," he says.

"I know. I've just never seen one."

"I know," he says.

The next night we're driving the same roads looking for the house that we stole the baby Jesus from. It's almost five in the morning. I have a final at eight. Trucks and school buses are starting to appear on the road around us.

"I don't believe this," Tony says.

"Me either," I say.

Jon and Kevin stay quiet, snickering in the back.

So why are we taking it back? We're not taking any of the reflectors back. Why Jesus? None of us are religious, really. Not enough, anyway, for us to consider our actions sacrilegious. That wasn't the problem at all. The problem was one of craftsmanship. The sleeping child was made of wood. Its edges and paint were uneven and crude. We were stunned. This wasn't anything that anyone bought in a store. Someone made this. Someone poured time and energy into an artifact of faith—a sloppy, unprofessional, but honest and true manifestation of religious belief. It wasn't that we felt guilt for stealing a religious figure straight out of a nativity scene, it's that we stole a pure and beautiful article of someone else's faith. I thought about wise men, animals, beggars, Mary and Joseph all kneeling, staring at an empty space on the ground. Maybe they'll look up at the stars and not see any. They won't see the single star burning brightly above them. The moon is blocking them out. Or maybe we stole that too.

After it sunk in that we were the most awful people to ever exist, we began to notice the ink and graphite markings made on the wood infant. Kevin had drawn the child's anatomy in place. Someone else gave it a middle finger.

Earlier tonight Tony, Jon, a now-sober Kevin, and I scrubbed the ink right off. Tried to replace the dignity we stole from the labor of someone's hands. Now we are looking for its home, had been looking for four hours.

"I think it's time to give up," Tony says, lighting a cigarette and holding his hand entirely out the window without cheating, a kind of penance.

"I should get some breakfast and coffee, then study for my exam," I say.

"You guys cool with that?" Tony asks Jon and Kevin.

They just laugh.

"You mind if we head back?" I ask.

"We've been ready for a while," Kevin says.

Jon laughs harder.

"What the hell are you laughing at?" Tony asks.

"We threw Jesus out the window," Jon says, then laughs more.

Tony and I just look at each other for a moment. Violent sound wells up inside of me, takes the form of a simple question, "When?"

"About an hour ago," Kevin says.

I am a silent frequency, humming low beneath ears, unsettling stomachs. Louder than the thunder that rattles my mother's china. I want to shake the moon from the sky. I want to put the stars back.

I can feel Tony looking at me for some sort of response. I offer none. He takes charge.

"Let's go home then," he says.

So we do, hanging our hands out the windows the entire way back, freezing our hands numb, trying to convince ourselves that, like us, Jesus didn't want to go home either.

A nother Tricky Day

The light is already on in her brother's kitchen when Anne comes downstairs. It's six o'clock and so pitch black dark outside it could be three in the morning.

"You're up early, Steffi," Anne says, entering the room.

Her ten-year-old niece, still in her PJs, is sitting at the table. Steffi appears to be doing schoolwork of some kind. She gives Anne a dark look. George, the Great Dane, gets up from the braided rug in the corner and comes over to Anne, wagging his tail. He's in love. The feeling is not mutual.

"Enough, George," Anne says and pushes him out the back door. She fills the tea kettle and puts it on a burner.

"I have to finish this for today," Steffi says.

Anne clearly recalls her niece declaring she had no homework, none at all, before plopping down next to her on the couch last night to watch TV. But she knows that, if living here is going to work, trying to replace Steffi's mother or acting as a disciplinarian of any kind can't be an option right now. The loss is too recent. Besides the kid is getting the work done and she's doing it at home, fulfilling the basic requirements of the definition.

"Need any help?" Anne asks.

"Not really, I'm very good at math," Steffi answers.

"I bet you are," Anne says. "How about some hot chocolate?"

"I'll have tea," Steffi says.

Anne makes two cups of orange pekoe, her own dark and strong, Steffi's diluted with milk and sugar. She leaves them to cool a bit and goes to the pantry for her box of shredded wheat cereal, hers because no one else will touch it. When she returns, Steffi has already taken a mug to the table. Anne pours her cereal into a bowl on the counter.

"Thank you, Aunt Anne," Steffi says demurely.

Anne, her back to her niece, smiles. She recognizes the glove thrown down in her niece's polite tone. Anne picks up the remaining mug and takes a sip of lightened, sweetened tea.

"You're welcome, honey," she says.

Nick, Steffi's fifteen-year-old brother, shambles sleepily into the kitchen.

"Hey, you guys," he says. "What's for breakfast?"

George, wanting in, begins to bark outside the back door.

Anne's move, made at the juncture of two lives coming apart, coinciding with her imminent divorce and her brother's separation, has for the most part been good for all concerned. Her niece and nephew, however, provide further proof, as if she needed it, that you can't count on anything. Nick—sweet, sunny and absolutely dependable—is not the obnoxious teen—all rebellion, attitude and mouth—his age might lead one to expect. That role belongs to ten-year-old Steffi, who would if she could, Anne thinks, pierce her nose and dye her pretty brown hair Kool-Aid purple. Anne's job as a librarian brings her into contact with quite a few fourth graders. Steffi is the only one whose wardrobe—meaning what she actually wears out of a closet full of mostly appropriate clothes—is black. Anne sympathizes; she too is in mourning for the life she used to have.

By quarter to eight Anne is on her way to work, a trip that not so long ago involved a thirty-minute commute from the city. Since she's moved in with her brother, she walks to her job in this small upstate village where she was raised. She's in charge of the information desk at the public library, fielding questions lobbed at her by phone, email and by the actual person standing in front of her. They ask for the name of the capital of Bolivia, the correct spelling of "Dostoevsky" and the whereabouts of the bathroom. Five days a week, Tuesday through Saturday, from eight to five, Anne is the woman with all the answers.

She crosses the lift bridge over the Barge Canal, Fairport's yuppified remnant of the old Erie Canal. As she walks, she looks down through the metal grating that forms the pedestrian walkway on either side of the thoroughfare. It's March and the day is cloudy and cool. Below Anne, what's left of the water—it's drained every fall for the winter months—looks green and cold and fast moving. The experience disorients her, making her slightly dizzy and the teeniest bit nauseated, but she does it anyway. It feels a bit like moving forward and sideways at the same time.

Once across the bridge, Anne makes a right turn onto the walkway that leads to the rear of the library and uses her key to enter through the back entrance, a door marked "Staff Only."

"Hey, Anne," her co-worker, Paul, calls out to her as she hangs up her coat.

"Another Tricky Day," Anne says.

"The Who," Paul replies.

They take turns at this game. One quotes a phrase from a song or play, a novel, a poem, from anything to do with popular culture really, and the other attempts to nail it. Consequences vary depending on the whim of the vanquisher. Yesterday, the victory had been Anne's. She'd known instinctively "The Four Sea-

sons" as referred to by Paul could have nothing whatever to do with Vivaldi. She'd answered Frankie Valli and exacted a Twinkie from the contents of Paul's nutritionally oblivious packed lunch.

It's mid-morning when she picks up the phone and says hello to caller number fourteen.

"Anne?"

It's her brother's voice.

"Joe?"

"I need you to pick Nick up after you get home. He has play practice 'til five. Steffi has soccer after school and I promised I'd take her and stay for the game."

"And Anne..." he adds.

"Yes?"

"Can you walk George around noon? Mr. Ratcliff just arrived plus I have to meet with his wife at twelve-thirty."

Anne's brother is a funeral director; Mr. Ratcliff, sadly, is dead.

"You know George is not my favorite."

Joe's dog is one more fly in the ointment of her life. Anne is no dog person, especially not a large dog person, not at all. George is big, one hundred and twenty-two pounds on his last visit to the vet. Worse, he's infatuated with Anne. Par for the course that the one male who finds her irresistible sheds and has dog breath.

"I wouldn't ask but this is kind of an emergency," her brother says. "And maybe you and Nick could start supper tonight? There's ground round in the refrigerator."

Anne sighs, then says goodbye and hangs up.

When it's time for Anne's lunch, Paul comes by to relieve her. First he sits in her chair. Then he takes all the pencils out of her ceramic frog's wide-open mouth and inspects them closely. He returns five and holds up the one that's left—the newest, sharpest one with the pinkest eraser and looks up at her.

"Mine," he says.

If Anne didn't know better, she'd swear Paul has developed a mild crush on her since discovering her husband, soon to be ex, is now out of the picture. The fact that he's already married doesn't seem to enter into the equation, for him at least. It feels strange to be thinking this way again, conscious of and gauging her effect on the opposite sex.

At home, Anne takes the meat out of the freezer and makes two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on the kitchen counter and eats one, giving the other to the riveted big dog who has been watching her every move. Then she takes the leash off the hook next to the back door and attaches it to his collar. They can walk to the park, circle the tennis court and soccer fields and return with ten minutes to spare, plenty of time for her to get back to work.

As they proceed down the street, Anne once again realizes that whatever George is doing when he's walked, it's nothing so subservient as heeling. He walks companionably next to her, seeming to view himself more as escort than dog. Luckily, her brother has done a good job training the behemoth. Whenever George sees a cat, another dog, a squirrel, anything that might normally trigger the chase response that would concomitantly annihilate the person holding his leash, he's been taught to sit and stay on command until all temptation passes. He does this impeccably but not without protest; his whines, howls and series of extended squeaks and muffled barks all attest to the unfairness of his position.

The weather has moderated over the course of the morning and the sun is feebly attempting a comeback. Spring arrives next Thursday. Joe's wife's birthday is also next week. It's been almost a year since Lindsay got the week at Clown College she requested as a fortieth birthday present. After the seven days were up, she'd called Joe and told him she'd fallen in love with one Ethan Spivac, a.k.a. Bobo, her clown coach, and wasn't coming back. Last summer the kids spent a month as circus brats on the road with their mother, and both weeks of Christmas vacation with her in Sarasota. It was from this last visit that Steffi had returned garbed in a black sweater and skirt over a black leotard, covered by another long, black, tunic-like, knit thing, all of it worn under the bright blue ski jacket her father had given her for Christmas.

"Whatever can she be thinking?" Joe asked Anne.

She hadn't known if he was referring to Lindsay or Steffi but recognized the question instantly as one of those to which no satisfactory answer exists.

A month later, after ten years of a marriage that had managed a condo, a car, an SUV, a Harley, two mountain bikes, a bass boat and a pickup truck but not the child they'd both wanted, Randy informed her he was off to follow his dream. It was one he was sorry to say didn't include her. Anne had felt bushwhacked. What dream? Had there been talk of dreams she'd somehow missed? What about her own dreams? She couldn't have named a single one at that moment but she was sure they existed. Somewhere.

She still hasn't figured it out—how to assign blame, what he did, what she did, even the exact sequence of events that have led to her finding herself here, castaway, tossed gasping up onto this chilly beach of a March day, a single, thirty-

eight-year-old librarian, living with her brother and walking an over-sized mutt on her lunch hour. How did she and Joe, two perfectly normal people, ever manage to choose two such exotics, one gone off to join the circus and the other a croupier on the Delta Queen out of Cincinnati?

School is in session so, of course, the soccer fields are empty. On the tennis court, two cold-looking women in heavy sweaters and short skirts are hitting a bright yellow tennis ball back and forth. The rhythmic plock-plock-plock sound the ball makes as it hits the court's surface immediately attracts George's attention; he very much likes chasing balls. At the sound of Anne's "Sit!" he plops down on his haunches and begins to whine. She convinces him it's okay to move on with the help of a number of the small, bone-shaped treats with which her pockets are, as often as not, now filled.

Back at work, Anne reclaims her desk and chair from Paul.

"I left you something," he says.

Three Hershey's kisses sit on a folded piece of paper in the center of her desk. Anne has always liked Paul. She's drawn to him, she thinks, because he's funny and smart and because, unlike her husband, he's not especially good-looking. She's just now realizing how stressful it had been living with a movie-star-handsome man with no discernable sense of humor, though having missed so much else, it's possible that existed too and she just didn't see it. The fact that Paul so obviously likes her helps.

Anne opens the message and reads it. She looks up. Paul is now on the other side of the reading room, his eyes on her. Lately she's been asking herself who in the world would want a woman approaching middle age, one with a bad attitude besides, whose ex-husband is now a riverboat gambler. Apparently, she has her answer.

Anne shakes her head slowly back and forth. No. She's had some experience with the frying pan; she plans to keep her distance from the fire if at all possible. Paul shrugs his shoulders and smiles. It's apparent that she hasn't discouraged him at all. She isn't entirely sorry.

It's ten after five by the time she walks home from the library and gets her car. It's almost five-twenty when she pulls into the high school parking lot. Nick is sitting on the curb manipulating the controls of one of those small, hand-held video games. He's tried to show her how the game works but one look at the tiny green screen with its miniscule moving objects is enough to give her a migraine.

He gets up and opens the car door.

"Hi, Aunt Anne," he says.

"Sorry I'm late."

"Where's Dad?"

"At Steffi's soccer game."

"Good. She's been trying to get him to stay and watch her play, but before you came there was never time."

"We also have responsibilities tonight."

"Yeah?"

"Your father has asked us to start supper."

"We can stop at The Green Dragon. Everybody likes Chinese."

"No, Nick. We're going home and, with no outside help, we are going to feed a family."

"Stopping on the way to pick up ice cream?"

"A distinct possibility."

When Steffi and Joe get home, there is meatloaf in the oven, canned peas are heating in a pan, and bread is warming on the stove. Ketchup stands ready on the set table.

"Smells good," Joe says, coming into the kitchen.

Steffi, however, stomps across the floor into the other room. They hear the "whoomph" as she throws herself onto the couch.

"Is someone having a bad day?" Nick inquires.

"Shut up," Steffi yells.

"Leave your sister alone," Joe says.

"The Red Hawks lost?" Anne asks.

"Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!" Steffi cries from the den.

When the phone rings Joe is spooning fudge ripple ice cream into bowls while Nick feeds small bits of leftover meatloaf to George, who takes them delicately from his fingers with a blissful expression. Steffi flies to the wall phone and Anne watches as she settles cross-legged on the floor, her body curled protectively around the receiver she's holding to her ear. Anne can hear no part of the conversation. Nevertheless, she knows there is a woman at the other end of the line. She has a red ball for a nose and is wearing a painted-on smile. A nimbus of wild orange hair surrounds the stark white of her face. Some of the greasepaint has rubbed off onto the phone she's using.

"I love you," the clown is telling her daughter. "I love you. I love you."

What The Waves Can Take

Pass the pretty plates for the passersby to place
slick silver forks and sharpened knives
into her varnished palms and placards opened wide
with a cabinet adorned with delicate designs.

She's polished, papered, painted with her honest hands,
still hoping with her happy thoughts;
she deems to dress, caress the lacquered locks
with bleach and household products bought
to bring a healthy brightness to
this wooden box where dust-filled dishes lie.

Her husband hasn't dropped a line; he hasn't called
nor left a leaf to serve as telltale sign.
He's gone: He leapt into the seething sea
and severed there the soaring waves from shore
and bore his life upon his naked back
until his hair was floating in the green
of seaweed's tress, and nothing less.

He left his wife to slave away
removing, rubbing laminated tiles.
She's grave while placing plates upon
a polished placard gaping, opened wide,
and senses that his dry and earthen skin
has slowly changed to form fine fins
and turn her sea-borne man into a seal.

Meditations on a Girl Walking

She walks ahead hugging the wall like a blind cat who silently roamed the vacant halls of my apartment. His thick head bumping corners in delicate style.

Is she one of Cinderella's stepsisters, an unfortunate girl whose foxglove shaded eyes wound up on the end of a shallow's beak leaving red flesh spoons?

Her back curves into an ivory comb like the ones fine ladies used to secure updos—three sharp teeth and semi-circle to keep a French twist in place.

Her gait is hypnotic. The slow glide of a ghost. She is electrified vapor, constant repetition projected in this dark hall. Does she have a face?

Is she Psyche endlessly following her Eros' fleeting specter through the rotting bowels of old buildings? She wants to mend that candle-wax burn on his back.

And still she walks ahead of me, hugging walls. Under her spell, I follow her deeper into damp darkness. The scuffing shoes against stone my light in the blackness.

Train Moving (1945)

heard sunsets prowling
cluttered streets the iron
wheels rocked shabby
restaurants all the tilted
nonesuch houses crusty
curbsteps leading down
to rusted rails so saw we
too the bleak disgruntled
faces fleeing looking sad
no words to tell us of the
good or sorrow but fogged
windows of the front-end
parlor car might dim show
a pleasant smile a friendly
wave, some traveling gal.

Biting my lips
just so I don't wear
my teeth down from grinning
fierce love of her,
ready to grimace and imitate
her delicate movements
of appetite
before the screams.

She drinks like a fish
breathes, welcoming
the intimate shushing
of milk, I hold my tongue
at the ready
to soothe or suckle,
to chide if she's naughty
though naughtiness
is just a show that she's empty
and ready for seconds.

I huff till she's happy
and put her down, pacified.

Speaking of her,
I try not to show
my delight or to wear
that silly expression
of satisfied hunger
lest she grow jealous
and wake, mouthing anger.

She wears lace when cotton will do,
Mattie Mayhew, the Deacon's wife,
famous for her lemon pie
and poppycosh.
She pats her nose with a silk kerchief
when paper tissues will do.
She bleaches her sinks,
sparkling white, she and the
Deacon live alone.
Beige is her favorite hue
A prolific baker of loaves,
Churning them out like Christ,
multiplying fish.
She wears a white cotton slip
that hides the brambling rose
of youth,
looping around her upper thigh
drips blood from thorns of ink.

Blossom

Just as diamonds hold no jewel
my wife lays round with child.

i'm reminded of the fat little bee
bullying its way into the long pink flower
under the summer's unruly sun.

the bee shook the blossom the way
a boy rides a cardboard boat, and then
left all dusty in his furry striped pajamas.

i long to explore my daughter's dense riches, empty
of all that shouldn't be, blazing a dusty, long
sing-song trail through the space of seasons.

i will squeeze honey from sand to meet her,
to ease her from my trembling wife.

A Storm Warning Has Been Issued

Blizzard conditions, the TV warns,
fifty mile an hour winds, gale force,
power outages, two feet of snow.

That means no water, no heat
eleven degrees and us at the end
of the road, trapped, cut off,

How thin the crust of walls
that separates us from deadly
cold, how fragile our perch

here in warm blooded life, the sea
knocking hard on the shore,
tearing off chunks of cliff.

We take for granted that we can
camp here on the snow buried
land and there will be light

when we turn the switch
and water will flow from the faucet
and the furnace will respond

to the thermostat. We assume
and then it all changes. The sky
tears and deadly force rushes in.

The Youngest

My mother the seer told me
not to cry when we cut my yellow dress.
"No children." She tied the stripes
around tomato stakes.

My job was pinching off suckers'
albino gropings before leaves musked out:
unsplit triplets shaped like scorched continents,
the crowded club of Mr. Lee's fingers.

Mercy killing in the ghost town:
trap-rats knobbed meatless with tumors,
eyes buried in quivering dunes.
I learned not to laugh.

Before the quake she wheeled up gasping,
grabbed my wrist. "Wake the others."
Sprinting stampede after moonlit imprint
of her white nightgown.

She stroked its babyhead lumps, left it
on the vine. Held out her arms.
"I take that back," she said.
"You cry if you need."

Francesca Learns about the Passing of Winter

After deceit split me in two
My feet longed for mama's carpet

A collage of leaves, pine needles
Gray stones and pellets.

Grasswidowhood at my back,
And my husband's house of slate

The mammoth fireplace
Red as that beckoning pit.

Instead, I found a shed for reading
And inside, a coin, the year of my birth:

No motherhood beckoning like starlings'
Hard little eyes

Or stonewalls emerging from snow,
Icicles dropping from eaves.

But starlings, pecking at each letter,
Tricked by green and young desire

Before the good book tumbled from my hands,
As I fell into that place.

Letter To Harry

Dear Harry,

So now you're dead and what did all those thirty-five years mean anyway? I remember you throwing homing pigeons into the air and they never came back. Amazing. They just never did. And all that pot you smoked and the bad music you listened to, the Bee Gees along with Kiss, what good will it do you now? And the dusty roads and the crisp new corvette you owned, and the fat girls you loved to fuck, easy kill, you said, but that was you, always taking the path of least resistance, and you never once had a boned-face girl.

And your family had more money than mine, sure I blamed you for that. The immaculate farm where your father nearly worked me to death, do you remember, Harry? You laughed at me while I picked beans and baled the cotton. I hated you, but I never showed it. Always held my anger back, because that's what was expected of me. One day, I knew, revenge would be sweet, and I held out for the boned-face girls with dark hair and slender legs.

You ignorant son-of-a-bitch, Harry. I knew you were no good from the start, but did you have to make it so easy, like your big fat life. Poor bastard. Shot dead in Pearl River, Louisiana on a Saturday night fighting over some nameless whore in the worst place imaginable. You made it too easy Harry, I never had to lift a finger to see your demise. The earth must be cold where you are, old friend. But no hard feelings, eh? Rest well, Harry, the grave becomes you. I'll take care of your father myself.

Your Comforter

Louis E. Bourgeois

At The Rhino Exhibit

I'm not sure what
I'm aiming for,
it to become more human
or me, more animal.

The rhino's hooves lay heavy claim
to the ground beneath
but its steady eyes are out
for more elusive game.

I grip the railing,
equally up to this
summer afternoon sizing up,
this quest for commonality.

I can imagine it
lounging on a sofa,
its massive gray body
crashing through to the floor.

Maybe it sees me
nibbling the grass beside it,
my scrawniness eventually
building up to its bulk.

My kid is dragging on my arm,
a nagging shrew in miniature.
He wants to see the monkeys,
then the crocodiles.

Sure, let's spend time with
the ones who look like us,
and then the usual reptilians,
unafraid to flaunt our hunger.

John Grey 49

Bathtime

Cold porcelain chipped clawfoot tub
hot water making steamed windows
nude lace and sheer silk hanging on the hook
my hands become his hands
long strong hands that fix things
traveling up and down my body
buttons erect under the ceiling's peeling paint
the dream of his hair and tongue
collecting the steam rising from me.

Instead of Killing Myself I Slept with You (after Robert Creeley)

I sd to myself

because I couldn't help myself

Anne I sd Anne

which was also my mother's name

and her mother's name before her

Anne I sd

we're all alone in the dark here

all deaf dumb and blind

what else is there for you to do

Anne I sd

but turn on the lights Anne

turn up the music

and moving into his arms Anne

begin to dance Anne

I sd

Anne

Harlem Woman

Harlem woman
Rich like a secret
Wrapped in colors
The moon in summer
Glued above her
By a syrup of
Cane sugar and
Dark wine

She moves like a
Melting miracle
Her hands on
Her hips
On my mind

She hears my voice
A dog's bark from thirsty lips
Lets me taste her shadow
Harlem woman

Nadav Zohar

A Poem

Sweaty palms,
Hot feet
Riding steady on the merry-go-round of hard times
A heartbeat away from words of freedom,
Searching the pile of complacent aspirations
Clinging to my lack of preparation

A numb touch of the future tapped me on the shoulder,
And as I turned my head to respond
seconds of suppressing sorrow sabotaged,
the **minutes** of muffled, misleading mixtures of madness,
I flipped my lip on one side
smacked my teeth
and said what!
Immediately the content was unsubstantiated & its context meaningless

I stood there so far removed
My undertones presented the body language of
Hours hiding horrible handicaps,
Hesitation rules the battling field as your deceitful attributes shine through
The **Days** of despondent despair dilute the destruction of falsely
Accusing billions and wrongfully convicting millions,
I am paralyzed by the words that ripen tomorrow
So for comfort
I begin to drift off into
Weeks of wicked weakness wavering wrath as wisdom,
The envy of another man's problem continues
to leave us swinging at the angry noise of worth
WHOA, is what I said to nature as her mother told me
don't count the weeks before the seasons change

ummm & I thought I was on a roll
seconds, minutes, hours, days and weeks.

Sierra Leone

53

Startling

I ran into
my ex really briefly
before I left
she said she broke up
with some guy
I guess his mother
is dying or something
and she called to see
if he still wanted
to be friends
he told her he
had a one night stand

I imagine he fucked
this other girl's brains out
maybe made the paint
peel in his room
I know our mutual ex
could never do that
I guess this guy
was an "artist type" like
me, he drank and made
obscure jokes about
Admiral Scott freezing
in the arctic or how
the old waitress at Denny's
had an affair with one
of the guys involved in
the Tea-Pot Dome Scandal

anyway the guy tells her
he's joining the Army
pretty soon but she's not mad

at him because her mother
fixed her up with
a friend of the family
the guy does computer programming
or something clean like that
he owns a house too
maybe an SUV

she asked me when I was
leaving and I said soon

Umbilicus

This knot of fossilized
offal, pressed
into stopgap service,
smelling of rotten
fish, or sewers,
disfigures her flesh
with its severed history,
the swallowed secret
now hard and harmless,
gnarled, vestigial
trace of the link
back to reptiles,
shrunk, a stump
of an extra limb
now clamped off,
like the firm,
ductile nipple
that muzzles her mouth.

Her Majesty
commands that all
artists be hanged for
not dedicating their
poems to Her
Highness.

Fare thee well.

The Staff Section

Passing judgment is much easier than being judged, and so we, the NEXUS staff, also submit for your judgment.

In the Children's Room of the Library

He sits on the floor, away from the other kids,
transfixed with fascination as his eyes pour over a chapter book.
Curls of golden hair adorn his head
like the holy aura of Saints on stained-glass windows.

"I can't believe he's reading already,"
his mother says to the librarian. Her voice is proud
but her face looks worried. She remembers
that smart means Different to eyes ignorant of their own envy.

There is something greater than majesty in him,
this gifted child whose eyes pierce more effortlessly
than a solar flare, who knows nothing but to expect
pleasure and ease.

The Brahman and the Pit

Inside of some trees are
booby-trap bee-sting potential
rootless and unquenchable honey
so gold to entice greed
in the buds, sounds of buzz
the mammals thirst for a toast
to the search of sugar
its own patience
their intestines guttural, human
vines, the natural spirals
are stairway trails used by
shameless priests
who presently retreat from heads, five
of serpents tied to tails
fangs inflicting a certain life-craze
speech pattern, oohs and ahhs
of pricked footprints on weed-ladders
if heaven would wait
the gates would have zipper sides
or pliable velcro knob joints
for the souls to pierce
with their shaking fingers
there are no thoughts except--
forests beg for flight,
staying stranded slaves
to wildlife weight
elephants with alliances, brown
the trumpet sounds roll up
blurred kite strings attaching
trees to clouds
the million frozen bodies are interlaced
their hands held to dirt crusting
wrists wrapped in twine of grass and
twigs from low branches
monuments of such pitfalls do not exist
but for our hindu imagination
as sweet as fleas
the way down tenacious with honey
as time likewise is
the only heart is bones

Cyclical

they kept walking
taking rights till
they recognized landscapes,
then straight on till their legs
started complaining so
they would camp
to wake up in the morning
with their heads spinning,
wait till dawn
to start taking rights,
walking towards the rising sun
excited to find
the same landscape rising.

Their journal laid on the ground
where they dropped it on a Friday,
as he snacked she filled the last
few pages with
the same tale
she wrote three weeks before.
They walked off
and were not seen again.

Bound in black leather,
written in blue ink
on weathered pages,
there it sat under shifting sand dunes,
taking on a semblance of ideas lost.
Footsteps echoed down into Earth
every so often, sometimes the falling body
of a lost soul searching.
The journals pages became

Jim Tarjeft

In Passing

In the snapping of a twig, a moment lost
in a falling leaf.

In a once worn path now overgrown in thistle
tread only by memory.

In a summer field, where lost days hide like secrets
in blackberry brambles and wildflowers.

In the now becoming then, the casual drift of it,
the unnoticed pull of its current.

In time. In its wrinkled memories. In what lies ahead.
In what will become of us.

Michael White

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The Players

this is what people are

Edward Beatty is a poet, retired from work, who is writing to us from Illinois.

Rob Boley works at Wright State University, where he has earned two degrees in English. He lives in Kettering with his wife, daughter, and four cats. He believes that poetry is the lawless connection of words, hearts, and minds. Sadly, he instructed us not to tell anyone this because it is "Rob's little secret."

Lisa Boucher is an English major at Wright State, with an emphasis in the thunderous path of creative writing. According to her, also, she's on the down hill stretch.

Louis E. Bourgeois is a graduate of Louisiana State University and the University of Mississippi. He currently instructs English at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. He is also the editor of VOX, Oxford.

James Brubaker is a graduate student at Wright State. When he is not attending class or teaching, he is doing something which is somehow related to the TV show *Lost*.

Brad Buchanan has been published in more than 100 journals worldwide: he is originally from Canada.

Mark Cunningham is a poet who received an MFA from the University of Virginia and is submitting to us from somewhere in the Charlottesville area.

Ziggy Edwards, a graduate of fiction writing at the University of Pittsburgh, currently works as a web editor and medical writer for the Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute.

Phil Estes is submitting from Japan, where he has become more popular than all of the washed-up American baseball players who ever played for the Hanshin Tigers.

Arthur Gottlieb is a friendly poet, from Oregon, whose work has appeared in the vast majority of happening literary magazines throughout the planet.

Jonathan Greenhouse when not dining voraciously with *Liposcelis divinatorius*, can be spotted at poetry readings or trying to be a pacifist on supermarket checkout lines. During the week, he also interprets back and forth between the Spanish and English languages; on the weekends, if he is to be looked for, he can be found walking in circles and squares.

John Grey is from Providence, Rhode Island.

Hugh Jones lives in Southern Illinois with his wife who shares with him the attributes of being music graduates from Indiana University.

Sierra Leone, currently residing in Dayton, Ohio, is the co-owner and Vice President of Tripple Croxx Records & Entertainment. Author, comic, poet, community activist, and entrepreneur, she has opened for such poets as Nikki Giovanni, and Jessica Care Moore, been featured in *Essence*, and fortunate to study with Amiri Baraka, Sonya Sanchez and Haki Madhadbuti. Sierra's album "Handwritten" features the single "Ear Infection."

Robert Lee Mahon is from Union, Montana.

B.Z. Niditch is not only a poet, playwright, and fiction writer, but also the Artistic Director of "The Original Theatre" in Boston.

John Noland is submitting to us from his residence near the ocean in Coos Bay, Oregon.

Marge Piercy is the author of seventeen novels including The New York Times Bestseller *Gone To Soldiers*; the National Bestseller *The Longings of Women* and the classic *Woman on the Edge of Time*; seventeen volumes of poetry, and a critically acclaimed memoir *Sleeping with Cats*. Born in center

city Detroit, educated at the University of Michigan, the recipient of four honorary doctorates, she has been a key player in many of the major progressive political battles of our time, including the anti-Vietnam war and the women's movement, and most recently an active participant in the resistance to the war in Iraq.

Karen Sisk is a student at Wright State University that is in a huge rush to graduate for reasons unknown to the rest of us. She is also a self-proclaimed English nerd who hails from the city of Cleveland.

Gail Taylor, a graduate teaching assistant at WSU, has received fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and the Vermont Studio Center in addition to a travel grant from the MacArthur Foundation.

Anthony Walstorm is a poet who has studied at the University of Hawaii and must have enjoyed the atmosphere.

MaryJo White is a retired public school primary teacher and also a graduate student at Wright State University pursuing an MA in English literature with an emphasis in writing creatively.

Ryan G. Van Cleave is submitting from South Carolina, where he serves as the poetry editor of *The South Carolina Review*.

Nadav Zohar came to the United States in 1991 and is now studying motion picture production at Wright State University.

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